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THE ART AMATEUR.

My Note Book.

Leonato.—Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?
Don John.—Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true.
—Much Ado About Nothing.



THE auction sale of the art collection of Mr. James H. Stebbins took place on the evening of February 12th, the eighty numbers of the catalogue being disposed of for \$160,215. A table of the buyers and what they paid for the pictures will be found toward the end of the magazine.

Chickering Hall was filled by an interesting and interested audience who for three hours kept their eyes fixed upon the extemporized high red curtain which extended across the stage and opened mysteriously from time to time to allow a new picture to be placed, by unseen hands, upon the easel, under the steady glare of the electric light. For three hours the well-dressed crowd, of whom nearly half were ladies, listened patiently to Auctioneer Kirby's illustrated monologue, accented only by the portentous click of his ivory gavel. Nearly all the well-known buyers and habitués were present. Wide-awake men and boys, stationed throughout the hall and galleries, eagerly scanned the rows of seats for any sign which they could construe into a bid and shout it to the auctioneer. Very few persons called out their own bids. That is bad form on such occasions. The proper thing to do, if you wish to "raise" your neighbor \$1000 or so, is to elevate your eyebrows; scratch your ear; rub your chin; put the fore-finger to the side of your nose, or insert a finger in the button-hole of your coat. These are the regular signals of certain bidders and are well understood by the auctioneer and his aids.

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ONE person among the buyers was a mystery, "Who is the bald-headed man with a pointed red beard?" every one was asking. He sat near the stage and nodded at Mr. Kirby until he had nodded away over \$20,000. He seemed to bid on every picture. I watched his movements with an interest that became fascination when he began bidding wildly on No 41, described in the catalogue as a "crayon drawing by Rosa Bonheur," raising his opponent by hundreds and fifties until the lot was knocked down to him for \$725! I had especially remarked this picture while it was on exhibition and took it for some sort of a photographic reproduction of a crayon drawing, finished in India ink and Chinese white, and had noted with amusement the elaborate signature carefully put in with a brush. Had this man bought for \$725 what was intrinsically worth not as many cents, or was my first impression erroneous?

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FROM inquiry at Chickering Hall, next morning, it appeared that the stranger was a certain W. A. Keeler, Jr., but no one could place him. He had been there just before me, and had paid for all his purchases, as I learned later, with a certified check for \$20,100, signed "F. G. Bourne, agent." Fortunately the "Rosa Bonheur" was there still. I looked at it leisurely. No, there could be no doubt about it. It was a photograph on "plain paper," now yellow from too much exposure of the nitrate of silver in it to the daylight, which had also forced up the touches of Chinese white so that they were quite out of value. "What are you looking at so intently? Is there anything wrong?" said Mr. Kirby. I replied that he had sold a "doctored" photograph for an original drawing, and requested him to tell Mr. Stebbins I said this, so the matter might be investigated while there was yet time to do justice to the buyer. Mr. Kirby became somewhat sarcastic at my expense, but he agreed to do what I asked. He laughed to scorn the idea that Mr. Stebbins could have been imposed on. "This picture," he said, "has been hung conspicuously in Mr. Stebbins's house for fifteen years unchallenged. Lately, it has been on public exhibition and seen by nearly ten thousand persons, including all the artists and critics of New York. Now, don't you think it much more likely that *you* are mistaken?" The following day a letter came inviting me to call at his office, as, in view of my statement, Mr. Stebbins had requested the buyer of the picture to return it for examination. In the meanwhile, remembering that Mr. Kurtz had made a full-page reproduction of it for the catalogue, I

called to see him, feeling sure that he must have discovered the nature of the "drawing" when he took it out of the frame to photograph it. Mr. Kurtz, I learned, was at home ill in bed. His operator, who had made the negative, however, fully confirmed my statement—namely, that the picture was nothing but a photographic print touched up with India ink and Chinese white. Later, Mr. Kurtz himself sent word to Mr. Kirby and Mr. Stebbins that this was undoubtedly the truth.

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"THAT settles it," said Mr. Kirby. "There is nothing now for us to do but get back the picture and return the purchase money to the buyer." "Exactly so," said Mr. Stebbins, "I shall take the picture to Paris, when I go there shortly, and see what the dealer I bought it of has to say about it. You know, the French laws are very severe in such matters, and there is a heavy 'reclamation' in cases of fraud by picture dealers; although" he added, "I really do not believe that any fraud was intended by the man who sold me that picture. He stands too well for that to be possible." Mr. Stebbins is himself so straightforward that it is difficult for him to suspect trickery in others.

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MY story is not yet quite complete. At last accounts, it did not seem that the gentleman who bought this unique "Rosa Bonheur" was at all anxious to return it. No satisfactory answer could be obtained to Mr. Stebbins's offer to take the picture back, and (up to the hour of going to press) the buyer seemed to care more for preserving his incognito than for the loss of \$725. But let him know that his secret is at an end, and that he may now go and get his money. I can see no reasonable excuse for concealing the fact that the mysterious W. A. Keeler, Jr., is a clerk in the office of the Treasurer of the Singer Sewing Machine Company; that his purchases were made on behalf of Mr. Alfred Corning Clark, the Treasurer of the company, and that Mr. Bourne, who signed the certified check in payment for the pictures, is Secretary. It was for this same Mr. Clark, it appears, that certain mysterious big purchases (including Gérôme's "Police Verso," at a cost of \$11,000) were made in 1887, at the sale of the A. T. Stewart collection. At the Spencer sale, he paid \$19,500 for Fortuny's "Serpent Charmer." At the recent sale of the Twachtman and Weir pictures, in the person of W. A. Keeler, Jr., he "encouraged native art" to the extent of nearly \$2000! Mr. Keeler, by the way, showed much better judgment here than at the Stebbins sale, when he bid up the Charles Meissonier to \$3600, being misled probably in the belief that he was getting a picture by the Meissonier at that price. Be that as it may, the evidence is overwhelming that his principal is addicted to the secret and pernicious habit of buying valuable pictures, and, I dare say, of enjoying them; and as he appears to have been indulging in this abhorrent vice for several years, and with, apparently, an exhaustless purse, doubtless by this time he has concealed about his premises a very considerable collection.

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A PHILOSOPHIC onlooker must have noted that the ladies and gentlemen who bore the trouble of arranging and watching the Costume Reception were engaged in solving in a thoroughly American way the problem which is met in Europe by outlay on the part of Government. They were giving a helping hand to American art, not so much in drawing a few thousand dollars into the treasury of a deserving society as in calling the attention of well-to-do people to the fine arts and inviting fashion to help the amateurs in encouraging our native artists.—The New York Times.

The writer of the above must be credulous indeed if he believes that the managers of the "Costume Reception," in making use of the National Academy on this occasion, supposed for a moment that "our native artists" would be benefited by the patronage of these "well-to-do people." Native art, or any other kind of art, would be in a bad way if it depended on any such encouragement. As a kindly acquiescence on the part of the artists in a scheme to help a deserving society, their participation was most creditable; but the less said about the matter, in the name of art, the better. Simultaneous with the dancing among the pictures in the Academy of Design in New York was a concert among the pictures in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. That was another way, I suppose, of "calling the attention of well-to-do people to the fine arts and inviting fashion to help the amateurs in encouraging our native artists." What will be the next?

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IT is not likely that another Costume Reception will be given soon in New York—at least at the Academy,

which turns out to have been ill suited for the purpose. There were many correct and beautiful historical costumes, and, it need hardly be said, many beautiful women. Minuet and quadrille were danced by sets of friends who had rehearsed together. There was little or no general dancing. The "society" and artist elements mixed hardly better than would oil and water. The former seemed to enjoy itself pretty well, while the latter merely looked on. The contributions by both parties may be fairly stated as follows:

The Society of Water Color Artists

Provided the Academy,
And the Pictures,
and
The Other Decorations.

The Society of Decorative Art

Provided the Dancers
And their Friends,
and
Took the Profits.

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THERE seems to be no falling off in the demand, in this country, for high-priced Chinese porcelains. I hear of many new collectors springing up, especially in the West, who pay their thousands for a small specimen of solid color as cheerfully as if they had been amateurs all their lives. The truth is that really choice objects are becoming rare. It is hardly worth while now for a dealer to go to Pekin, which used to be the fountain-head for supplies. One must wait until some great collection is broken up, and take one's chance among other anxious connoisseurs. Then, of course, the longest purse generally wins. If one goes to Europe on what the politicians call "a still hunt," he will probably not gain much.

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MR. DANA'S recent excursion netted him not more than a dozen new pieces for his cabinet, although each of these certainly was a treasure in its way. They were all of inconsiderable size, and included: a blue-and-white bottle about three inches high, soft paste, with exquisite pencilling under the glaze; a little cup, soft paste, with pink crackle, the nature of the coloring of which is a mooted point among connoisseurs; a charmingly engraved white piece, tree-trunk design, about four inches high; two dainty specimens of peach-blown—a little flat rouge-box, similar to those sold in the Morgan collection, and an ink-well; also a shallow dish, with rich pasty glaze, Seuen-tih period, and of that indescribable silvery gray called "clair-de-lune," for want of a better name.

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THERE have been some important "openings" by the dealers lately. The most recent was that of the porcelains and jades forwarded to Messrs. Herter Brothers by Mr. Hayashi, the famous Japanese expert, who is now their buyer. The choicest pieces were snapped up immediately, and, marvellous to relate, the collectors found the prices surprisingly moderate. A superbly carved white jade sceptre, of serpentine form, went to Mr. Brayton Ives, who also became the owner of a remarkable piece of carved black jade—fet-suy—about five inches high, in the form of a rock, and of a double cylinder of sea-green jade (about $5\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ inches), a charming specimen of this costly color. Mr. Rufus E. Moore bought a pair of finely carved jade lanterns. Speaking of Mr. Ives's purchases reminds me of a mistake that must be corrected. In the "expert talk" with Mr. George F. Kunz, in The Art Amateur last month, he was made to say that Mr. Ives's superb jadeite jar is "evidently Amazon stone." This statement was intended to refer to the "lump of jade, the size of a man's head which came from the Amazon River and sold for £50." The error occurred through an inadvertent transposition of a paragraph by the printer.

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AT the Herter "opening" there were also excellent examples of blue-and-white and powder blue, and, as a symphony of reds, as choice a specimen of sang-de-boeuf as I have ever seen. But, alas! there is a fire-crack near the base, and although the defect cannot be seen when the vase is set upon its carved teak-wood stand, it depreciates the value from \$5000 to \$3500. To tell the truth, there are very few examples of this size—it is about seventeen inches high—without some blemish, from the connoisseur's point of view: there is either a fire-crack, or a metal mount to conceal a chip or a sawing, or the bottom has been ground, or the piece is defective in form.

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TO return to the dealers' "openings." That well-known buyer, Mr. Chester Holcomb, recently brought back from China a great many cases of porcelains and jades, including some very fine pieces. He represented both Mr. Lanthier and Messrs. Sypher & Co., and the stock was duly divided up between the two firms. There seems to be no doubt among the best judges that Mr.

Lanthier got by far the best pieces. But curious to relate, when the "openings" took place, Sypher managed to dispose of most of his stock, while Lanthier has many of his best pieces still on hand. One explanation is that the customers of Sypher are more easily satisfied than those of Lanthier; but that is hardly sufficient explanation. Another and more reasonable one is that buyers are waiting for the big auction of the "collection" to be sold at the American Art Association rooms. "What is that collection?" I am asked. Thereby hangs a tale.

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THE American Art Association connect it with "two Mandarin' merchants," with unpronounceable names, who, it is said, have brought it over from China. But their connection with it must be very remote. I am sorry that I cannot give the name of the enterprising American who got together this collection. I have been asked, for some reason or other, not to do so. It may be said, though, that, in the course of his chequered career, he has had almost exceptional opportunities, of which, when in funds, he freely availed himself. As a young man, he went out to Shanghai to seek his fortune, and, acquiring the Chinese language, found profitable employment as interpreter for various English and American merchants. He soon rose to the position of private secretary and interpreter to a Minister of State, which gave him much influence. Leaving this post he engaged in the curio business with an Englishman, who put in a capital of \$40,000 against the other's "experience." At the end of a short period, their positions, it is said, were reversed. At all events, the money was all gone, and it was the Englishman who had the "experience." The other returned to the Minister of State, but soon after he went into partnership, in Pekin, with a Chinaman. This lasted about a year, when the firm failed. He next became agent for a well-known New York banking house, and it was at this time, I understand, that he formed this collection. For some years it has been well known to the American curio market, and Mr. Robertson, the buyer in China for the American Art Association, of which he is a member, has himself, it is said, freely bought out of it from time to time. Another American dealer tried, not long ago, to buy some of the pieces; but it was said that the collection was hypothecated to the Hong Kong and Shanghai bank, who refused to let any one see it. Under what circumstances it came to be released and shipped to this city for sale, I do not know. But here it is. It contains some fine pieces, and Mr. Sutton says it will be sold "without reserve."

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THE Union League Club, which, for several years past, has done much for the education of its members in the fine-arts, by its excellent winter monthly exhibitions, at the February meeting initiated most of them into a new form of artistic pleasure by supplementing an interesting collection of paintings by what, in some respects, was the most notable exhibition of Oriental porcelains ever seen in New York. The new Committee on Art includes Mr. William G. Nichols and Mr. Thomas B. Clarke, and to these gentlemen is chiefly due the success of the experiment. The four cases of objects contained only specimens of solid color glazes, but in them was the pick of the best collections in New York. Mr. Brayton Ives and Mr. Clarke each contributed twenty-five pieces, Mr. James A. Garland lent twenty-four, and Mr. Charles Stewart Smith, twenty-one. Mr. Charles A. Dana lent but a few pieces from his collection, but they included what, all points considered, must, I think, be conceded to be the finest specimen of sang-de-boeuf in this city, if not, indeed, in this country; his famous great dark green vase (probably unrivalled), and his exquisite peach-blown vase. The notable contribution of Mr. Henry O. Havemeyer was his glorious sang-de-boeuf, which is only second to the Dana vase, being very rich in color and remarkably free from blemish; but there is a considerable fire-crack at the base. These two pieces held sway in a case devoted to these extraordinary examples of sang-de-boeuf and kindred reds.

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AMONG the group also were: Mr. Charles Stewart Smith's vase of sang-de-boeuf, which while somewhat too narrow for positive beauty, comes near to Mr. Dana's in the creamy whiteness of the porcelain and mellow-ness of color; the three examples lent by Mr. Ives—one with a high shoulder, very handsome in form, but lacking the depth of tone of Mr. Dana's; another, of charmingly uniform color except at the foot, where the glaze has run unevenly; and the smallest and best of the trio, which is very good in color and form. It may be

remarked here that the chief test of merit, after all, should rest on the degree of success with which the potter has attained his purpose—i. e., on the potter's *art*—and that much stress should not be laid on the mere color of a piece; for color is apt to be more or less a matter of chemical accident.

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THE biberon—the only one in the case—lent by Mr. Garland was perfect in form and color. A piece of this shape, of such excellence, of the Kang-he period, is rarely seen. The only other good example in New York that I know of is owned by Mr. W. McKay Laffan; it would have been a welcome addition to the group. Mr. Nicholls exhibited the brilliant Herter vase I have mentioned in another column. Mr. Dana, besides a vase of "crushed strawberry," of the usual size—the regulation vase of the kind we are considering varies in height from about sixteen to twenty inches—showed one of the true sang-de-boeuf color, of the depressed bulb form, a piece which would have been very notable had it not been overshadowed by the finer one from Mr. Dana's collection. This gentleman's cabinet, by the way, contains four other charming vases of sang-de-boeuf, and a matchless plaque of the same color (about fifteen inches diameter) with a dragon in the centre, which it is to be hoped will be seen at some future exhibition at the Union League Club. Perhaps, too, Mr. Ives may be induced to show his glorious pure white Kang-he plaque with enamelled chrysanthemum decoration on front and back; his big, exquisitely enamelled Yung Ching bottle with figures in semi-relief, and his (probably unique) vase of "ashes-of-roses" (eighteen inches high); for the exhibition under notice is seductively mentioned in the catalogue as "an *inaugural* display of oriental art objects." What a vista of possibilities of pleasure to come this opens up to the imagination of one who knows what is contained in some of the homes of New York!

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A SINGLE paragraph must suffice for reference to the other cases of porcelains. Many of the objects have been described already in "My Note Book." One of the cases of miniature pieces of color, for instance, represented the cream of Mr. Thomas B. Clarke's collection. The companion case was rich in pieces of hardly less interest, contributed by Mr. James A. Garland and Mr. Charles Stewart Smith. The third case was divided by a shelf. Above, was the pick of Mr. Brayton Ives's exquisite little collection of "peach-blown," including the companion to the "\$18,000 Morgan piece," which visitors insisted on speaking of as "*the* peach blow." The readers of The Art Amateur know better than this. As I stated many months ago, this piece came from the Salting collection in London, and was sold to Mr. Ives by Mr. Sutton, who also sold Mr. Dana his unsurpassed specimen of the same genus, shown in this case. Notable, below the shelf, were Mr. Clarke's ivory white biberon and his large Rose-du-Barri specimen; Mr. Dana's dark green bottle, already noticed, and his glorious "powder-blue" jar; Mr. Garland's turquoise ovoid vase, his fine coral, and his rare pink glaze.

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THE auction sale at Ortiges's Fifth Avenue galleries, on February 7th, of the oil and pastel pictures and studies by J. Alden Weir and J. H. Twachtman was a great chance for bargains. Everything was absolutely sold, I am assured. The catalogue contained 84 numbers, the names of the artists alternating in the most amicable manner. About \$7300 was realized, and this amount was divided almost equally between them. The subsequent sale of the pictures of Charles H. Miller at the same galleries was a failure. All the more important canvases were withdrawn, and the smaller ones which were really sold were mostly sacrificed.

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THE very important auction sale of the Erwin Davis collection, at Ortiges's Fifth Avenue galleries, on the evenings of March 19th and 20th, should bring a large sum of money, including, as it does, such canvases as Bastien-Lepage's "Joan of Arc," Courbet's "Wave," Manet's "Boy with a Sword" and "Portrait of a Lady," Degas's "Ballet Girls," and admirable examples of Delacroix, Decamps, Gericault, Corot, Rousseau, Diaz, Daubigny, Dupré, Michel, Millet, Mauve, Maris, Couture and Cazin. In important respects the collection surpasses that of Albert Spencer sold last year, and it is so superior to the lately dispersed Stebbins collection that the two can hardly be spoken of together. There will be no illustrated catalogue, on the principle, I suppose, that "good wine needs no bush." MONTEZUMA.

THE WEIR AND TWACHTMAN EXHIBITION.

NEARLY ninety paintings in oil, pastels and water colors by Messrs. J. Alden Weir and J. H. Twachtman were placed on exhibition at the Fifth Avenue Art galleries, in February, prior to their sale at auction by Ortiges & Co. Each of these artists has developed a highly personal style, or, some might call it, manner of painting, yet they have much in common, and the display as a whole was more harmonious than might be thought possible.

Several of Mr. Weir's paintings in this exhibition were landscapes, suggesting not remotely the wild mountain scenes in which Courbet delighted. "In the Adirondacks" showed the top of a "divide," with grassy and wooded slopes in dark, cool greens against a fine morning sky. "A Path in the Woods" was a broad and rather "happy-go-lucky" study of foliage; "Solitude," on the contrary, a very careful study of boulders scattered along a hill-side; "Early Morning," a very successful rendering of a bit of a rocky hill-side farm, with the flush of sunrise in the strip of sky above it. Mr. Twachtman is, perhaps, at his best in marines, but he had many excellent landscapes, among them a beautiful little study of a shallow pool, with a row of trees and red-roofed cottages beyond, "Near Ville d'Avray;" a pond with dark rock and trees; "Barnet Woods, Cincinnati;" and "November," a study of a brush-grown upland in which there were more colors and less color than is common with him. Ordinarily, he confines himself to a few grays, greens, and subdued tints of earth or sand, with peculiarly tender blues and pearly grays in the sky. In this scheme were his "Middle Brook Farm," a typical American landscape, raw, barren and rocky, but delightful in its way as a page of description out of Hawthorne or Emerson. Of his marine subjects, "Snow Bound," vessels laid up beside the wharf in an ice-covered river, was one of the best. "Bridgeport" wharves, and "Harbor of Dieppe," with a vessel at anchor, were also good examples of his peculiar talent.

The portrait and figure subjects by Mr. Weir were slighter than usual, and hardly satisfactory, save as studies, two early pictures excepted, "Children Burying a Bird" and "At the Fountain, Granada;" but his still life paintings were of fine quality, for the most part. A group of objects in silver and bronze, with a red wax taper, and a study of "Fruit," apples on the bough and off it, and a bit of gray table-cloth were rich in color and deft in handling to an extraordinary degree. Some of Mr. Twachtman's pastels, previously shown at the Pastellists' Exhibition of last year, were of very great merit; and the only water-color in the collection, Mr. Weir's dogs "By the Fireside," was also remarkably good. Most of the other pastels were mere notes.

AN "Art Students' and Amateurs' Competitive Prize Exhibition" is announced by the enterprising art publishers, Messrs. Raphael Tuck & Sons, to be held in January, 1890, at the galleries of the Royal Institute, London, for which prizes amounting to five hundred guineas (\$2500) and one hundred diplomas will be awarded. The judges will be the artists, Sir John Everett Millais, R.A., Marcus Stone, R.A., George H. Boughton, A.R.A., and Solomon J. Solomon. The judges in a preliminary competition in New York of American contributions are Frank D. Millet, N.A., William M. Chase, A.N.A., and Montague Marks. All contributions from the United States and Canada accepted by this committee as worthy to compete for the prizes will be sent from New York to London free, and at the close of the exhibition will be returned free of expense. The liberal terms of the competition and the announcement that "no charge will be made to competitors" ought to insure a large representation of amateurs from this side of the Atlantic. Full particulars can be found in special circulars to be had from the principal dealers in artists' materials.

THE visitor to Avery's new galleries in Fifth Avenue will find in two cases a most interesting collection of miniatures by Mr. Gerald Sinclair Heywood, including portraits of some noted people on both sides of the Atlantic. Mrs. Cleveland is there in white, gold and pearls; Miss Ellen Terry as Beatrice, her roguish expression caught to perfection; Miss Grove, of Boston, a typical New England beauty; Miss Breeze, of New York; Dr. Sinclair Smyth, General Francklyn, Mr. Lyster, the celebrated English engineer, and others. We may later give, in connection with some articles in preparation on the subject of miniatures, to be followed by instructions for the practice of the art by the amateur, a detailed account of Mr. Heywood's work.